PHOTODRAMA

W.M. Hannon

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THE PHOTODRAMA

ITS PLACE AMONG : THE FINE ARTS :

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WITHIN WHOSE WALLS THE
AUTHOR RECEIVED MANY IN-
SPIRATIONS DURING
THE MOST IMPRESS-
IONABLE YEARS
OF HIS LIFE

REVISED
OCTOBER 1915

PREFACE

This little work on the photodrama was prepared primarily for the general reader who has neither the time nor the inclination, perhaps, to study the photodrama in detail, and for the connoisseur of the Fine Arts generally who desires to take a dilettante attitude regarding this art in particular. In short, it is prepared for those who are desirous of getting a bird's-eye view of this most ubiquitous, most popular, and newest of the arts.

Though avowedly technical in tone and treatment, this essay, it is hoped, will be relieved of an academic air by its profusion of concrete examples and "modern instances." Indeed, wherever possible, the concrete is given precedence over the abstract.

It is hoped that this little essay will fall into the hands of lovers of the artistic who sincerely but mistakenly believe that the photodrama should be decried as an art-form, and treated with disdain, as the majority of actors and stage-managers of the "legitimate" drama treated it in its pristine days—but only in its pristine days!

Nola Studios —*W. M. H.*
August, 1915

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THE photodrama, or "silent" drama, is a species of art that is allied to the art of pantomime on one side, and to the drama proper on the other. It is primarily like the art of pantomime in that its actors are voiceless; it is unlike it, in that it possesses no conventional gestures. The photodrama will be compared to the drama proper quite fully hereafter. Meanwhile, it is well to remember that every moving picture "play" is no more entitled to be dignified by the term photodrama than an incoherent vaudeville sketch is entitled to be placed in the category of the "legitimate" drama.

For the photodrama is an art-form that is worthy of the attention of a serious artist. It is as definite in some respects in its construction as the sonnet. String-

ing together a more or less related group of scenes without dramatic sequence does not make a photodrama, though, to be sure, in its early days the moving-picture play was just such a vehicle of expression, as the inordinate ubiquity of the "chase" pictures in those days attested. However, it should be said that the best producers to-day do conform, at least in a general way, to the standards of the formally perfect photoplay.

Mr. William Archer, the great dramatic critic, has said that "there are no rules for writing plays"; and Mr. Henry James, the eminent Anglo-American novelist, has said that "the only rule for a novel is that it must be interesting." Of course, these two fiats are to be understood in a qualified sense: it is not to be inferred from them that the dramaturgic and novelistic arts are not governed by certain principles. At the same time, it must be inferred that the principles governing the craftsmanship of the drama

and the novel are not too definitive. And this is true, as any student of these two art-forms knows. Contrariwise, this statement could not be accurately made regarding the photodrama or the short-story; for both of these arts have a definitive, well-understood technique. Though the technique and dramaturgy of the photodrama are in their present status nicely balanced, they are dynamic rather than static, and are constantly employing new expedients for their development. In passing, it may not be amiss to mention that, like the short-story also, the photodrama has reached its highest development in France and America.

The photodrama can, therefore, be measured, so to speak, with a yard stick. Indeed, in a strictly physical sense, the photodrama is measured in feet, and this film "footage" bears a direct relationship to the kind of photodrama that can be produced within its compass,

just as the size, shape, and physical appointments of the "legitimate" stage have always directly determined the kind of drama that could be produced upon it. For instance, the mechanical and lighting equipment of the modern stage permits a degree of realism that was undreamt of in the Greek or Elizabethan drama. And in the photodrama there is permitted a treatment of theme that is extensive and panoramic (rather than intensive and microscopic) in a fashion that no stage of ancient or modern times could hope to equal, still less surpass.

Strange as it might at first sight appear, literature proper lends very little aid comparatively to the photodrama. Indeed, the literary content of even the best written photodrama is such a negligible quantity, that one might well question its place among the literary forms proper, as say, the essay or the oration. But when one remembers that even in the drama proper, the message to the

audience is usually more visual than auditory, the fact becomes more patent. And when it is recognized that a good pantomime is the basis of many good dramas, a higher respect is felt for the photodrama as a medium of artistic expression.

A priori, it would seem that the caption or leader would give the writer of epigrams an excellent chance to practise his art. But this is hardly true for the reason that the caption usually performs the simple function of explaining the true application of the particular action to which it refers, and which action were it not explained by the caption would be either ambiguous in itself, or to the story as a whole. And, of course, it is sound doctrine that a caption should not be used to fill a *hiatus* in the plot, and thereby achieve the fundamental demand of the photodrama for *continuity* by this vicarious expedient. It is seldom that the photodramatist has the chance to

have a play of clever "dialogue" on the screen. Comedy offers a better medium. apparently than drama for the display of epigrammatic captions. Perhaps this is because brevity is the soul of wit, and because the epigram appeals to the head rather than the heart. As some one has cleverly said, the world is a comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel. Certainly the major part of the fun in George Ade's "Fables in Slang" on the screen resides in the cleverness of Mr. Ade's captions, aided and abetted by the genius of American slang. But it must not be inferred that photodramatic comedies must be replete with captions. Chaplin's comedies alone would dispel this inference.

The photodrama is at once a mechanical and a fine art. A discussion of it as a mechanical art would not be germane to the present thesis. Besides, the lay mind can readily apprehend, in a general way, its purely mechanical and scientific sides.

But giving the photodrama a place among the fine arts would seem to be a more difficult task. Certain it is that it is a more involved one.

Speaking from a standpoint of Aesthetics, the photodrama is a *representative* fine art, like sculpture and painting, rather than a *presentative* one, like architecture or music. An old treatise on aesthetics would probably call it an "imitative" art. Using the word in another sense, however, it is selective rather than merely imitative, as all good art should be. It would seem, therefore, that the photodrama should be given a place among the "humanities." The photodrama is a fine art, as contradistinguished from the merely mechanical arts, in that it possesses an impalpable, elusive, incommunicable element that technique or craftsmanship or mechanics of any kind can never supply, if the creator lacks real inspirational force. For the great artist is he who treats common things with

an uncommon imagination, who, in the felicitous phraseology of an eminent novelist, possesses the "admirable gift of individualizing, of etherealizing the commonplace."

To illustrate this principle from an example from a sister art, the novel: There are probably fifty living American novelists who display in their novels greater knowledge of the novelistic art than Dickens. But will their works compare with those of Dickens for all that? Most assuredly not. And why? Because the art of Dickens possesses the "inspiration" that raises it above the commonplace (though its themes may be commonplace), and makes it vital art. The works of the others to a great extent represent merely craftsmen. Dickens' works represent a great personality. And so it is in the photodrama. A few artistic directors receive an emolument per annum that runs well into five, and even six figures; while others, with just as much experi-

ence, flounder around from studio to studio picking up whatever is to be found.

Artistic sincerity demands that the shortcomings and limitations of an art be set forth as well as its virtues.

Accordingly, it must be confessed that the photodrama does not seem to lend itself readily to the development of the idealistic and subjective in art. Its great field unquestionably is objective realism, though it also handles romantic themes in great fashion, as, for example, the American photodrama that was taken from a popular novel—"Graustark."

Probably no idealistic picturization on the American screen ever created more favorable comment from the public than did the sumptuous production of "Hypocrites." And justly so. For this production was praiseworthy in many particulars. Yet, in its purely idealistic aspects it did not "ring true" in the judgment of the present commentator. In a series of scenes in which several per-

sons wearing a distinctly "this-worldly" appearance and manner were shown climbing a mountain side as symbolical of their spiritual uplift, their performance seemed incongruous—somehow at variance with the eternal fitness of things. Some will say that this objection is captious—too impressionistic. Granted that it is impressionistic. Impressionism has always been ranked as a valid school of art. Indeed, in a deep and true sense, impressionism rather than exactitude is the aim of all art. If this were not true an ordinary photograph would be greater art than the greatest painting in the world. The plain truth is that the photographic processes are too graphic and definite to always convey subjective and symbolical data. Photography is too exact—it includes the non-essential as well as the essential—to give merely the essence of things. In this respect, the celluloid film is not a great art medium. In short, the photodrama is not quite equal

to the demands of those hyper-aesthetic and super-sensitive souls who expect in all art-products a subtle revelation of the essence of things—nay, what might be termed the *elusive essence* of things.

The photodrama is a complex—nay, a truly composite art. At first blush, it would seem a deliberate exaggeration to say that a director of photodramas is constantly required to exercise a knowledge of the principles of painting, sculpture, architecture, interior decorating, and landscape gardening. Yet a few simple examples will show how this broad culture is necessary.

Primarily, a moving picture is a—picture! That is too obvious to require statement some will say. But is it, as a matter of fact? Isn't it true that even the average, well-educated person does not know the principles of balance, proportion, and grouping in a picture? Then, a knowledge of the art of painting would be useful after all, wouldn't it? Suppose,

now, the director is called upon to build an "interior" set representing an art studio. Suppose, further, that a statue of Venus of Milo is a necessary adjunct of such a scene. The property man brings the director a statue with arms intact! The director approves of this statue. Obviously, a slight knowledge of the sculptural masterpieces of the world with their history would prove very useful to this director!

To take an example relating to the art of architecture: Suppose the director had under production a Greek drama by Sophocles, and was desirous of getting the proper "atmosphere" by getting "exteriors" showing examples of the best Greek architecture. Suppose, instead of using the replica of the Parthenon at Athens that stands on the campus of Girard College in Philadelphia, he used the Rotunda of the University of Virginia which is a replica of the Pantheon at Rome, and an excellent example of

Roman architecture. Would not every architect who saw the picture on the screen scorn the idea that its producer was an artist? As for interior decorating, in these days when many people of good taste hesitate to furnish their homes according to their own ideas, it is easy enough to see how a director could commit a faux pas here that would verge on the "tragic". Similarly, a director who ignored horticulture and landscape gardening might show a luxuriant, semi-tropical flower bed as the product of the rigorous climate of New England. Thus, it is easy to see that a good director must be a versatile, resourceful man— a man of broad culture, wide experience, and infinite tact.

The photodrama may under one classification be divided into three parts: first, the writing of the scenario; second, the actual acting of the various characters; and third, the guidance of the production as a whole by the producer, or, to

use a more usual term for the same functionary, the director. Broadly speaking, the writing of the scenario involves creative power; the acting, interpretative power; and the directing, creative, interpretative, and for want of a better term, executive power. Thus the function of the director is by far the greatest.

The present commentator is disposed to believe that ordinarily the director is half "the show"—the author, the actors, the scenic artists, and so on, the other half. Certain it is that a poor director can make a flavorless, commonplace production with good actors, a good plot, and good "sets." In a few rare cases, however, the actor or author might carry off the honors single-handed, as it were.

To illustrate this from an analogous set of cases chosen from the "legitimate" field of the American theatre: If the play were by Clyde Fitch, the author would probably be the ascendant; if the play

were ordinarily good with David Warfield playing the "lead," the actor would probably be the ascendant; and if the play were ordinarily good with an ordinarily good "star" playing the leading role with David Belasco as the producer, the producer would probably be the ascendant.

To take a supposititious example from the "movie" field: Maintaining a "policy of strict neutrality" regarding the delicate question of histrionic capability, it is easy to name the three most popular photodramatic players in America today. They are: Miss Mary Pickford and Messrs. Francis X. Bushman and Charles Chaplin. Suppose a comedy-drama photoplay written by George Ade is imagined in which these three players have equally good parts. Suppose, further, that Mr. D. W. Griffith were to be called upon to direct this galaxy. Who would get the honors, to use a familiar bridge term? The chances are the ver-

dicts would be somewhat as follows: The business and professional men in the average American audience would divide their votes between Miss Pickford and Chaplin; the feminine "contingent," to use newspaper English, would find "Francis X." irresistible; the writers and authors in the audience would be tempted to think that George Ade should get the lion's share of the praise; and the people who see the wheels go round in the studios (provided they were not actors of course !) would probably cast their votes for Mr. D. W. Griffith, the director.

In this connection, a word should be said regarding the comedy element in the photodrama. There are about as few good comedies as there are snakes in Ireland according to traditional reports. Examples of High Comedy or Polite Comedy are certainly rare specimens on the screen today. The horseplay, slap-stick element seems to be the

only incense that the producers offer to the Comic Spirit. Fame and fortune await the man or set of men who can consistently give the public good photoplay comedies.

A word here should be said about Chaplin. The universality of his appeal makes him a player apart from his fellows. As Chesterton might say, he is not only comic but cosmic. It seems the height of folly to criticize harshly a comedian who not only appeals to the butcher, baker and candlestick-maker, but also to the doctor, lawyer, and merchant chief. Those out of sympathy with Chaplin will say that he plays the lowest order of comedy. That is true in part. But one is forced to rejoin that he does this with the highest degree of skill. Some people will tell you that they cannot stand Chaplin's comedies. But then some people will tell you that they cannot stand Dickens' novels. So there you are!

A world that wears a drab-colored as-

pect to many of its denizens, should doff its cap to its comedians; they are boons too priceless to be slighted: for laughter is the golden gift of the gods.

And in a world where ultimate truths are unattainable, it is fairly safe to rely upon the artist who can make his appeal to all levels of humanity. Such an artist has delivered his message; he has played his part. There are many personages in Art regarding whom *dogmatic criticism* "gets off." And Chaplin is one of those personalities, if the present commentator has not missed his guess.

The relationship of the photodrama to the Fine Arts generally has been touched upon. A word should be said regarding the characteristic that distinguishes it and the drama from the other arts. This characteristic—its differentia, as logicians would say—is of course Acting.

An extended discussion of Acting would be out of place in the present dissertation. But it would be manifestly

illogical to ignore it in its relationship to the photodramatic studios.

Inasmuch as the message conveyed by the photodrama appeals seldom to the mind proper and never to the ear—as do sparkling epigrams and melodious cadences, respectively, in the drama—one would naturally expect the gesture work in the "silent" drama to be accentuated. But this is hardly the case. For the note—nay, the keynote—of the best screen portrayals is Repression. Hamlet's advice to the players would serve in good stead here; for to "saw the air" within the range and focus of the searching eye of the camera is a most decided histrionic indiscretion. As would be naturally supposed, facial expression is a big factor in photodramatic acting. To give verisimilitude to the scenes, words of the same import as real life or the dramatic stage would employ, are used by the players. And these improvised speeches give an air of naturalness to the "silent" drama

in its finished state on the screen that—that speaks louder than words! It would seem, therefore, that not only is it true, that words are almost as necessary to thoughts as thoughts to words, but that words are necessary to a proper rendition of certain actions of which they are the usual concomitants in real life. Hence, silence is not always golden in the photodrama in the making. And, unfortunately, neither is it always so in the finished product on the screen! To take a notable instance: the screen appearance of Madame Sarah Bernhardt—the divine, the incomparable Sarah—was at best but a lukewarm success.

But then it must be confessed that the screen has scarcely produced what critics of the "old school" call actors of "tone" and "distinction." However, due allowances must be made for youth; and certain it is that the photodrama is a vigorous child, to say the least.

Here and there in the present disser-

tation comparisons have already been made between the photodrama and the drama proper. But no formal comparison or analysis has been attempted. A formal analysis of the photodrama and the drama reveals three essential elements of all narrative; namely, the element of character, the element of action, and the element of setting. In character depiction or portrayal the drama is manifestly superior to the photodrama, particularly in what is commonly known as "character study." In action, many critics think that the two arts are about equal, though the drama would seem to have the "edge" on its rival here. But in setting, the photodrama is infinitely superior to the drama. If a ship and an ocean are required in a photodrama, one actually sees a ship and an ocean (or, at any rate, one thinks one sees a ship and an ocean—which amounts to the same thing!). But in the drama one will probably see a "painted ship on a painted

ocean," or, what is equally disillusioning, a piece of painted canvas waving "frantically" representing the ocean, and a crude piece of carpentry representing the ship.

In regard to the element of character, it should be said that "types" are splendid for "the pictures" for two reasons: first, because the message of the photodrama being delivered through the sense of sight only, it is easy for the spectators to detect an actor who does not look the part; and second, because the finer shades of character can only be depicted through words, and in a lesser measure, vocal characteristics. George Bernard Shaw in "Pygmalion" has with consummate cleverness and scientific accuracy shown the great part that the voice plays in producing character traits —at least as they reveal themselves outwardly.

In the photodrama one might say that the unity of time and place consists in

having a proper variety of these elements! However, there should always be what one writer in dealing with Hellenic art has felicitously termed "unity in variety".

Anyone who has ever seen the melodrammatic *serials* (one is tempted to spell the word c-e-r-e-a-l-s owing to the facility of their manufacturers in finding fancy names for the same concoction garnished with a few new fri ls and thrills each time it is served!) can readily recognize that the producer of photoplays is no respecter of time and place. Of course, when artistically handled, the latitude allowed the photodrama in handling the elements of time and place gives it a distinct advantage over the drama in these particulars. To take an ancient analogy: Aristotle in his "Poetics"—that far-reaching codification of criticism—stated that the Epic is a better narrative medium than Tragedy in its ability to freely shift the action from place to place. In like manner, the photodrama is superior in this

particular to the *acted drama*, as contra-distinguished from the so-called *closet drama*, which is really not drama at all in a strict sense.

Therefore, in a free and beautiful sense, undreamt of in Greek, Elizabethan, or Modern stagecraft, it may be said that "all the world's a stage" in the photodrama.

The photodrama, like the drama since the days of Shakespeare, disregards two of the trinity of unities held so sacred by the Greek dramatists; namely, the unity of time and the unity of place. The unity of action is regarded as highly as ever. Even it is violated in part now and then without very disastrous results, as Shakespeare violated it in "The Merchant of Venice." Broad, general literary and artistic principles, like emphasis and coherence, character development, though scarcely character analysis, balance and proportion, and cognate matters, are as applicable to the photo-

drama as to the drama. And as to-day sees the triumph of Realism, perhaps Ultra-Realism, in fiction and the acted drama, so also is this fetish worshiped by the devotees of the photodrama. It would seem that this wave of Realism emphasizes the objectivity of art at the expense of its subjectivity; and tends generally, to a surfacial view of things.

But, as has been said, Realism is the great field of the photodrama, and one should not quarrel with its producers for making the most of it. Besides, this realism has at least the merit of being very real: all of which cannot be said about the "realistic" creations of many of our analytical novelists who must needs have a "problem" before they can exercise their fanciful faculties.

Hence, Farce and Melodrama flourish in the photoplay, while the higher forms of dramaturgy like Comedy and Tragedy are neglected. In short, the moving picture play is moving only in a mechan-

ical and physical sense to a great extent. When it is moving drama in the sense that it moves the mind, the will, the heart, the soul of man—then, and then only, does it enjoy its highest evolution. But it is on its way! Many brilliant minds are lending their talents to its development, and even its tremendous commercial exploitation has not killed its artistry—nay, has helped it. For competition is oftentimes the life of art as it is of trade.

Now for a discussion of the all-important subjects of plot formation, and "stage conventions" as they apply to the photodrama.

Just as in the drama proper, the plot has its Rising action, its Climax, and its Falling action; so also are these elements present, in the photodrama—that is, the formally perfect photodrama. Again, in line with the famous definition of drama, the essential element may be said to be the struggle between wills.

No element should enter into the photodrama—however spectacular or interesting intrinsically—that does not help the furtherance of the plot. To do this would not only be inartistic generally, but if the economy of attention of the spectator is outraged by collateral incidents, he may find the plot so difficult to follow as to lose all interest in it. This rule should be scrupulously followed because the photodramatic action is conveyed through only one of the five senses—vision. If the eye does not see it, the ear cannot hear it, as is the case with the drama.

And this visualization, of course, applies even to the most delicate and psychologic action, such as is referred to by Mr. A. B. Walkley, the well known dramatic critic, when he quotes from Dryden: "'Every alteration or crossing of design, every new-sprung passion and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive

nothing to be action till the players come to blows.'"

Clever words cover a multitude of sins in the "legitimate" drama. The "silent" drama, of course, lacks this agency. It is a commonplace of the studios that the plot must be "put across" through the expedients of "business" and "situation," or not at all. Mr. E. W. Sargent in his treatise on the photoplay emphasizes this truth. Dialogue is of the *essence* of drama. Its analogue in the photodrama—the "caption" or "leader"—is only an *adjunct*. This distinction is fundamental.

A good photodramatic plot should be replete with movement, or rather, to speak more correctly, a series of movements that grow with cumulative intensity as the plot proceeds. In the words of a recent American song that had great vogue: "every little movement should have a meaning all its own." This is literally true, and not a mere

play upon words. The movement of a good plot should be forward, always forward, though, to be sure, through the element of suspense the movement is not always directly forward, but follows a see-saw course, as the children would say. In short, its line of action may be compared to that of an ascending spiral.

But to have action for action's sake, so to speak, is not plot. In such a case the characters would be what has been happily termed "plot-ridden." This principle can be illustrated by an extreme example by turning the mind to the "chase" pictures that were shown with such tiresome regularity on the screen in the pristine days of the photodrama. In a certain sense, the "chase" pictures were ALL ACTION; for it cannot be technically gainsaid that the actors were marionettes (thus neutralizing the element of character), and the panoramic scenes that flashed on the screen were accidental

and incidental (thus neutralizing the element of setting).

Therefore, it is plain, that plot is something more than activity. To construct a good plot is not an easy task. Even so great a genius as Charles Lamb despaired of ever mastering the plot of the drama. And the plot is relatively more important in the photodrama than in the drama.

A good plot is an "artful dodger"! It is ingenious while seeming to be ingenuous; it at once reveals and eludes "the point;" it puzzles the brain, yet pleases the understanding; it begets longing and satisfies it; it is deadly in its aim and lively in its execution; it is a certainty that wears a glorious air of uncertainty; in short, it is a subtle, insinuating mechanism that plays hide-and-seek with the imaginations of its spectators.

Aristotle in his "Poetics", as it is translated by Professor Lane Cooper, gives a definition of Plot in its relation to tragedy

that can be aptly applied to the photodrama: "Plot means that synthesis of the particular incidents which gives form or being to the tragedy as a whole." And when a scenario writer learns that a plot is not a hazy, haphazard affair but a structure that possesses an "architecture" of its own, he has overcome one of the pitfalls into which even a seasoned writer falls now and then.

In the photodrama it is well to have the major crisis, or Climax, and Conclusion coincide. A formal conclusion would almost necessarily in all cases prove to be in the words of Hamlet, weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. And, as in the drama, the effectiveness of the plot is dependent to a very great extent upon how the paramount element of suspense is handled. The element of plot is so accentuated in the photodrama that a complicated plot seems to be the great desideratum. Mr. H. A. Phillips in his work on the photodrama dogmatically asserts this. And

mere spectacle, however magnificent, will not take the place of plot. Indeed, a spectacle will often so hide a good plot as to almost "kill" it. For instance, Cabiria, which is a monumental work from a spectacular standpoint, is, in the judgment of the present commentator, artistically defective because it lacks balance and proportion in that its spectacular effects are so great, so attention-arresting, so to say, that the elements of character and action are obscured. Just as it is a fundamental of good architecture that decorational effects should be structural, so also is it a fundamental of the photodramatic art that the element of setting should be the usual environment of the characters; and not become an end in itself to woo and dazzle the audience, and thereby hide a slim plot and poor acting. To let a beautiful setting run away with the story, so to speak, would be as inartistic as for an architect to put the ornate

tracery of a Gothic cathedral upon the entablature of a severe and staid structure like a Doric temple.

There are in the photodrama certain counterparts to "stage conventions" and "dramatic license." For example, the photodramatic convention known as "cheating on the camera"—which consists in a player getting a better position before the camera than his relationship to the rest of the players in the scene would normally justify—is an expedient of emphasis that serves pretty much the same function as "throwing the spotlight" on an actor of the "legitimate," the comic opera, or the vaudeville stage. Similarly, a "close-view" or "bust" is an expedient of emphasis that might well be compared to an actor playing "down-stage" behind the footlights. Then there is the much-used, and frequently abused, "cut-back." This device gives coherence to a photodrama in the same way that the dramatist gives this quality to the

drama by repetition of essential lines or "business" in the drama. The "straight" and "cut-in" leaders really have no counterparts on the regular stage, though they serve pretty much the same function as the old-fashioned "asides" and "soliloquies" did in the drama. In this connection, it is pertinent to remark that some writers regard the so-called "leaderless" script as ideal, whereas others regard this form as being unsuitable for the complexity of the present-day photoplay. In the present commentator's judgment, leaderless script is almost impossible of practical achievement in a worth-while photodrama. Like the famous definition of metaphysics, it is a process of hunting for a black cat in a dark cellar that isn't there!

Speaking of the tendency to overdo the photodramas made from well-known fictive and dramatic works, Mr. Louis Reeves Harrison, the well-known writer and critic of photodramatic themes, says

graphically: "While live people care very little about the ashes of what has burnt itself out, the producer has an idea that a new flame can be blown into them by some modern author of ability and proposes to give both credit and compensation to the author of the ashes rather than of the flame. Right here lies one cause of the tiresome artificiality shown in a large majority of five-reel feature plays." To paraphrase Shakespeare slightly, this is such stuff as many *up-to-date* photodramas are made of! But there are other artistic flaws in photodramas to-day. One of the most conspicuous is the desire of producers to exploit the charms of some bright-eyed, wavy-haired, sprite-like damsel at the expense of the consistency of the plot, the other actors, and so on. Then, too, another artistic fault is the fact that the prolixity of many five-reel features is an inherent defect. It often lies in the fact that the five-reel feature tries to tell too much—

to tell two stories unwittingly instead of one sometimes. Many a tedious "five-reeler" could be cut down to a compact, unified three-reel production; and the action strengthened by a few carefully placed captions or leaders in the first part of the first reel.

Since photodramatic productions are in our present-day civilization commercial commodities like cotton and wheat, and since they are governed by the same economic law of supply and demand, it might be well to consider the effect of the public taste on the photodrama. To begin with, one cannot say, a priori, what the public wants. Empirical data alone constitute the guide to the public taste, or rather tastes, to speak more correctly. Neither can the public for long be forced to take what it does not want. And the public is wiser than many caterers to it believe. For instance, it is the public rather than the producer apparently who is discovering

that a "star" who scintillates in a "feature" is not the only bright light in the photodramatic firmament!

To consider any art without regard to the nature of its consumers is to manifest a narrowness of artistic judgment. This is particularly true of the arts that make their appeal to *the crowd*. And certainly the least cloistered of the arts are the drama and the photodrama.

Modern empirical psychology has established the fact that the mind of the crowd is an entity separate and distinct from that of any of the individuals composing it, just as the legal definition of a corporation is that it is an entity separate and distinct from its constituent members. Therefore, a pertinent question is this: What is the nature of the crowd that consumes the photodrama?

Now, it is a perfectly patent fact that no art in the world's history has ever made the wide appeal that the photo-

drama has. It makes its appeal to every race and in every clime. It does not *have* to fight for "a place in the sun"! Nay, it throws its light on the screen on practically every spot on the earth's surface where this luminary sheds its rays. It makes its appeal from Broadway to the Bowery. One is tempted to say that it is a part and parcel of the day's routine in snow-ridden Iceland and darkest Africa.

It is plain, therefore, that the photodrama is not an esoteric art. On the contrary, its ubiquity makes it the most exoteric of the arts. And when it is remembered that the mind of the crowd of even an intellectual group of people is somewhat primitive in its demands, it is easy to see how elementary must be the human passions depicted on the screen so that the message of the photodrama escapes "going over the heads" of its spectators.

These factors—namely the utter ubi-

quity of the photodrama coupled with its presentation to *the crowd*—must ever tend to lower its intellectual and artistic level.

Mr. Clayton Hamilton in his excellent treatise entitled "The Theory of the Theatre" gives an illuminating discussion of the psychology of the crowd in its relation to the drama, and cites the basic work on the subject by the French psychologist, Le Bon.

In this connection, it might be well to mention that the photodrama has brought to the attention of the general public many classic masterpieces that in their original form were only enjoyed by the art-loving and intellectual few in the quiet of their libraries. A notable example of this is Tolstoy's greatest novel—"Anna Karenina." It is reasonable to assume that only a few thousand Americans have read this work, despite the fact that it is to be found in English translations in public libraries throughout the

land. Yet it is fairly certain that the screen production of "Anna Karenina" has been witnessed by over a million Americans. As the greatness of this novel lies primarily in its character portrayals—and hence is not a good subject for screen presentation—this comparison makes a rather unflattering commentary on the taste of the general public. And certain it is that the characters in this novel under the guidance of Tolstoy's genius "get under the skin" in a fashion that makes the screen production, excellent though it is, as inferior to the novel as a photograph is to the living, breathing subject that it represents.

A problem of the day lies in this familiar question: Does the public want famous novels and dramas screened? The answer is simple: the public wants good Photodrama. The public doesn't care whether the stories come from hieroglyphics of an Egyptian temple in ruins, or are the latest products

of the best-seller purveyors—except that in both of these instances the stories are apt to be among the oldest in the world! If a famous novel or drama will picturize nicely, why put it on the screen by all means. If not, put it behind a screen and keep it there "till the stars grow cold"! To be sure, there is no intrinsic objection to taking photodramatic material from the drama, the novel, or any other form of narrative. Even the mighty Shakespeare took many of his plots from old legends. And Goethe in his greatest work—"Faust"— did the same thing.

But Shakespeare and Goethe only used these plots as "inspirational" material. Their own genius tinctured the working out of the stories to such a degree that the finished products resembled the personalities of Shakespeare and Goethe more than they did the original stories. It is one thing to use material as a source of inspiration;

and quite another to transmute a pattern of one kind into an analogous pattern of another kind. Oftentimes this would be as poor art as for a painter to paint from a sculptural instead of a living model. In both cases it is weak, attenuated art because it is a copy of a copy. Besides, the sooner the photodrama stands on its own feet as a distinct art, the sooner will it come into its own in every way.

A discussion often arises as to whether the long or short reel should prevail—as though public taste could be judged by a single touchstone! Why not have both always? Vaudeville and the "legitimate" thrive in the same communities—nay, for the most part, have the same patrons. Heaven forfend that the photodrama should not be infinitely various, as Stevenson said style should be. To say, for instance, that the multiple reel should eventually supplant the single reel would be as foolish as to say that

because Michelangelo covered square yards of space with pigment that the painters of miniatures have no right to existence—as if art were a product to be judged by a quantitative rather than a qualitative analysis !

In conclusion, it might be well to state that the American people should be proud of their great contributions to an art that is primarily indigenous and exoteric rather than exotic and esoteric. And when America lessens its dollar-chasing, nerve-assaulting pace, and devotes more time and thought to the art of living, it may become as great in art as it has in science. Meanwhile just as it might well be proud of the performances of Poe and Hawthorne in literature; of McKim and Richardson in architecture; of Sargent and Whistler in painting; of Saint Gaudens and Lorado Taft in sculpture; of Nevin and Herbert in music; of Clyde Fitch and David Belasco in the drama; so also in the youngest of the

arts, the photodrama, it might well be proud of the productions of—well, the photodrama must outgrow the follies of its youth before one can recognize its true artists, and separate the sheep from the goats!

WEIGHING WILSON

(An Impressionistic Sketch)

PRECISELY because President Wilson is a democrat spelled with a small "d" is he so eminently successful as a Democrat spelled with a capital "D." But for all that, he is not a typical American. Even the most rabid admirers of America and Americans must, upon reflection, concede this point. P. T. Barnum was a typical American. Like Mark Twain and Jane Addams, President Wilson is a super-American.

President Wilson possesses a catholic and cosmic personality at least in the sense that it runs the whole gamut of paradoxes and contradictions. Hence, we find him preaching democracy from the house tops, and practicing autocracy to perfection; making appointments sparingly, and disappointments even less sparingly; allowing Congress to do exactly as it pleases, provided it does

what he pleases; taking newspaper men into his confidence, thereby preventing (let us hope!) his being taken into their confidence; and, above all, we find him to be the bane of politicians, because he believes that what is politic for the people should be the politics of the party.

We hear a great deal of talk nowadays about the "secret of success." We rather fancy that in the case of President Wilson the secret of his success is that it is no secret, for, like everything else tangible or intangible connected with him, it is open and aboveboard. He is a great man for the very simple and excellent reason that he never tried to be great, but is content with being merely good. By deeds, rather than by words, he is teaching the American people that Intellect and Practicality may be found in one and the same individual; and is living down his reputation among so-called practical men as a college professor by living up to his position as

President of the United States. He is proving himself a master of the gentle art of ruling by force and pastmaster of the gentler art of forcing by rule; and would probably state very blandly that he is the ruler of his people whose people's rule rule him.

It may not be amiss to indulge in a few generalities about so vast and versatile a personality as is President Wilson's, for we feel certain that a man of iron can stand a little irony, and that he is sufficiently heavy to be made light of. We have never inquired by what master of delicate and subtle and veiled satire President Wilson's messages to Congress have been written! But we know from eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses that he at least, or at least he (as you please), reads them. We take it that President Wilson was an excellent lawyer before he became a college professor. Indeed, he knew enough about law to quit the practice thereof! And with all due

deference, we beg to state that we fancy Dr. Wilson is somewhat of a flirt—he does not seem to know whether he loves the Senate or Big Business the better. Perhaps—we say perhaps—he has a suspicion that the twain are "sisters under their skins." And he is the most reasonable of men in all matters: why he does not even object to the Democratic Platform, so long as the performance thereon is carried out in accordance with the Wilson Program!

President Wilson's ability to say much with few words; and, contrariwise, say little with many words, out-Talleyrands Talleyrand. He is virile enough to vitalize a great nation, and yet delicate enough to be "devitalized" by a few of its citizens. He is far-seeing enough to recognize that ultimately American independence may be dependent upon Pan-American interdependence. He has learned that the realm of politics is not a land flowing with milk and honey, and

that there may be bitterness in even the Sugar Question! But his ideals may still stand; for, he has also learned that a senator may not be in quest of "pork" just because his name happens to be J. "Ham" Lewis! But if he has learned many things in Washington, so also has he taught many there. Among other things, he has taught "official" Washington that there are two kinds of presidents: those who follow precedents blindly; and those who make precedents with their eyes open!

All in all, we believe he has already shown the kind of leadership that would give him a place in history beside the greatest leaders—if mankind were arrived at that stage of development where a contemporary could be judged as fairly as an antediluvian.

In short, President Wilson is temperamentally a quasi-autocratic humanitarian; educationally, a lawyer; vocationally, a sociologist and historian; and

avocationally, one of the greatest executives who ever presided over the American people.

ADVICE TO A YOUNG LAWYER

(A Playful Conceit)

VERILY, verily, my son, thou hast just received the certificate that enableth thee to give forth advice freely; namely, without compensation! Yea, and thou mayst even give it with impunity—to thine own self only!

Wherefore, shalt thou, with all good grace and without compensation or consideration, permit me, thy older advisor, to convey unto thee—the advisee herein, who knowest all the law there is and some there isn't, as well as what the law ought to be—these few words of wisdom in fee, receipt whereof is hereby presumed to be acknowledged by thee with due reluctance.

Thou must remember that law, even as all Gaul, is divided into three parts; to-wit, the case, the client, and the fee—and the greeatest of these is the fee! Wherefore, the last shall be treated of first.

ness in thy soul and the coin of the realm in thy pocket, inviteth him to lunch. I charge thee that thou never letteth thine ignorance of any point of law worry thee; for thine ignorance may cause thee to do what would otherwise be impossible; namely, giveth thy client sound advice. I charge thee further, that, if in the course of human events—or law practice—thou shouldst be caught giving or having given erroneous advice, thou canst always excuse the above and foregoing act of commission by stating that thou wert merely "practising"! And this above all: it is dangerous to advise thy client too freely—he might follow thy advice!

My son, thou knowest full well what music and magic and mystery there is in a "case," and how thy eyes scintillateth and thy nerves titillateth at the mere mention thereof. Wherefore, I charge thee that it were easier to stoppeth Roosevelt from running for the Presi-

But, my son, be not too happy about the fee; for it is as rare a specimen as the missing link. Yea, and it is often the only link that is missing between the young lawyer and the client; for many young lawyers are consulted, but few are fee-d! Indeed, it were better to be fee-d than to dine, and the latter followeth the former even as the night the day. And is it not true that a fee is the first thing that a young lawyer heareth of when he goeth to the Bar, and the last thing that he ever getteth? But, lest thou lose heart I say unto thee, that it were sound doctrine as regards the fee, that lawyers hopeth where even politicians despaireth!

Behold! if a person by some strange and unprecedented event of Fate entereth thy office to seek legal advice, referreth him to a good lawyer! But if he cometh for the purpose of talking about the weather, offereth him a chair, and if thou hast the milk of human kind-

dency for the "Nth" term or to make a Bull Moose goeth through the eye of a needle than for a young lawyer to handle a "case" without high spirits.

But thou desireth the advice herein as little as a suffragette would desireth to vote if the State permitteth her to do so!

Hence, wilt I close my little discourse, leaving with thee one final word of hope, which hath been a maxim since the time whence the memory of man runneth not to the contrary and is this: that, notwithstanding, nevertheless, howsoever, et cetera, badly a lawyer may fail at the Bar, like the poor baseball player, he always has a chance of being put on the Bench!